

# New Jersey

## Language Arts Literacy

### Curriculum Framework



#### Chapter 4

#### Vignettes for Language Arts Literacy



## VIGNETTES FOR LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY

Experiences in the classroom are the substance of stories, stories that illuminate what children know and can do and what teachers do in turn to guide students to new levels of understanding and proficiency. The vignettes on the following pages present just these kinds of stories and illustrate how skilled teachers integrate the individual language arts literacy standards and their indicators into a single, well-balanced lesson or unit.

The vignettes, which are grouped by grade level (elementary, middle, and secondary), represent the diverse instructional experiences that students at these levels need in order to develop literacy skills and behaviors. By instinct, we turn to those vignettes that pertain directly to our educational responsibilities. Yet, we need to read all the vignettes; the stories at the other grade levels can contribute to our understanding. As teachers, we need to know what prior experiences students bring to the classroom and to anticipate what curriculum goals will form our students' future educational program.

We should be able to find our own teaching practices reflected in some vignettes and instructional approaches that we do not use in others. The variety provides a valuable model of the many ways we help students develop and enhance their literacy skills. We need to approach each vignette with the questions, "What is there here that I can use with my students? What material am I using that will lend itself to this instructional approach? How might the strategies and techniques described in this vignette improve my students' learning?"

The format of the vignettes is designed to help teachers and administrators focus on key aspects of instructional planning and implementation. Each vignette addresses specific standards and their progress indicators for language arts literacy and cross-content workplace readiness. These focus indicators are identified in the box at the beginning of each vignette. The left-hand column presents the story; the right-hand column contains annotations or glosses that give the rationale for the specific teaching techniques and student behaviors described in the vignette. Following each vignette are three additional components: assessment possibilities for the learning experience conveyed in the story; questions for teacher reflection about the learning experience; and possible extensions that teachers could use to enhance students' literacy development. We can use these components as the basis for discussion with colleagues and for personal reflection.

In live classrooms, a vibrant curriculum addresses many of the indicators identified in the language arts literacy and cross-content workplace readiness standards. The vignettes in this chapter similarly encompass several standards and multiple indicators in these two critical areas. The matrix on pages 42–44 provides a summary of those indicators most clearly addressed in each story or vignette. You may see the potential for others.

No one vignette is meant to provide a comprehensive narrative of teaching and learning. Rather, it is in the collection of stories that we see the broad reach of an educational program grounded in the standards. The stories that follow the matrix are based on actual instructional approaches used by New Jersey educators in their classrooms. These vignettes are presented with profound respect for the children and regard for their future as literate citizens.

### MATRIX OF STANDARDS AND INDICATORS ADDRESSED IN VIGNETTES

| <b>Middle Vignettes</b>                     | <b>3.1</b>      | <b>3.2</b>  | <b>3.3</b>     | <b>3.4</b>          | <b>3.5</b>    | <b>Cross-Content Workplace</b>                             |
|---|-----------------|-------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------|--|
| <b>Create a Display Advertisement</b>       | 14–16           | 5, 8        | 7, 12, 15      | 19–20, 23–24        | 8, 11–13, 15  | 1 [1, 3]<br>3 [1–3, 7–8, 10–11, 14–15]<br>4 [1–3, 5, 7, 9] |
| <b>Critical Book Review</b>                 | 6–7, 12         | 5, 7–8      | 3–4, 7         | 2, 10–11, 18–23, 25 |               | 1 [1]<br>3 [1–3, 5, 8–10, 12]<br>4 [1–2, 9]                |
| <b>Comic Strip Creation</b>                 | 7, 12–13, 18    | 5–6, 8–9    | 3, 6–7, 10, 13 | 7, 9, 12, 18, 23    | 7, 10–13      | 1 [1]<br>3 [1–3, 8–11, 15]<br>4 [1–3, 5]                   |
| <b>Focus on Character</b>                   | 1, 12–13, 15–16 | 6–8         | 7, 11, 17      | 10–12, 20, 23       | 8, 10         | 1[1] 3 [1–3, 9–10]<br>4 [2–3]                              |
| <b>Multimedia Talk Show</b>                 | 1, 18, 20       | 6–8, 10–12  | 6–8, 10–13, 15 | 12, 20, 23, 25      | 10, 13–14, 17 | 1[1] 2 [1–3, 6, 9]<br>3 [1–5, 7–10, 13]<br>4 [1–5, 9–10]   |
| <b>Composing Meaning</b>                    | 7, 12           | 5, 7, 9, 11 | 6–7, 12, 16    | 10, 12, 16, 23      | 7, 12–14      | 1 [1] 2 [1–5, 7–9]<br>3 [1–3, 8–10]<br>4 [1–3, 5, 9]       |
| <b>Prereading in Social Studies</b>         | 1, 6–7, 12      | 5–8         | 4              | 7, 9, 15            | 5, 8, 12      | 1 [1]<br>3 [1–3, 8–11, 14]<br>4 [2–3, 5]                   |
| <b>Dialogue Notebooks</b>                   |                 |             | 2–4, 18        | 3–6, 18, 22–24      |               | 1 [1] 2 [2–3]<br>3 [1–4, 8] 4 [3]                          |
| <b>Charting Excitement</b>                  | 4, 6–7, 12–13   | 5–6, 8      | 7              | 1, 10, 12–13, 21    | 8             | 1 [1]<br>3 [1, 3, 8–9]<br>4 [2–3]                          |
| <b>Sentence Combining</b>                   | 4, 7, 12, 14    | 8–9         | 6, 10–11       | 6, 8, 20            |               | 3 [1–3, 10]<br>4 [3, 5]                                    |
| <b>The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe</b> | 8, 12–13        | 6–8         | 7, 17          | 6, 10, 12–13        | 7–8           | 1 [1]<br>3 [1, 3, 8–10]<br>4 [1–2]                         |
| <b>Writing the Unexpected Outcome</b>       | 6–8, 12, 14, 16 | 7–9         | 1–2, 5, 7, 10  | 14, 18, 21–22       |               | 1 [1]<br>3 [1–3, 8, 10]<br>4 [2–3]                         |
| <b>Using Adverb Clauses</b>                 | 7, 12, 14       | 5–9         | 10–11, 13      | 12, 20, 22          |               | 1 [1]<br>3 [1–3, 7, 9–10]<br>4 [1–3, 10]                   |
| <b>Vocabulary in Context</b>                | 6–7, 15         | 6–8         |                | 6, 12, 15           |               | 3 [1–4, 7, 10]<br>4 [1–3]                                  |

## FEATURES OF THE VIGNETTES

**Identifies content standards and progress indicators addressed in the vignette**

**Presents a vignette that models instructional strategies for targeting specific standards and indicators**

**Presents possible methods for observing and assessing student learning and performance**

**Introduces questions to extend thinking about teaching and learning strategies and results**

**Identifies related resources that support instruction**

VIGNETTES FOR LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY ▼▼▼▼▼▼▼

**Short Story and Film:**

**Language Arts Literacy Indicators:** 3.1 II, 7-9, III 3.2 II, 81 3.3 II, 7-9, III 3.4 II, 23, 26, 321 3.5 II, 12, IV, VI

**Cross-Grade Collaborations:** 1 II 2 II 3 II 3, 8-131 4 II 3, 6, 9-101

**Cross-Grade Collaborations**  
Elementary/Secondary

Ms. Melody, first-grade teacher, and Mr. Devereaux, eleventh- and twelfth-grade World Literature teacher, decided to have their students work concurrently on multifaceted projects concerning *The Secret of Roan Inish*, the Celtic-based short story and the film that writer/director John Sayles adapted from it. These projects would culminate in a sharing of the projects at the high school.

Mr. Devereaux visited the elementary classroom to introduce *The Secret of Roan Inish* and begin the oral reading of the story. Before beginning to read, he asked the students to think about favorite relatives they liked to see. At the end of the introductory reading, the children responded in a chain of associations—some more appropriate than others—linking the story to their own experiences:

"I visit my grandmother in Florida, and we go to the beach together."

"My family goes to the shore in the summer."

"My brother lives with my father. I miss him."

**Possible Assessments:**

1. Ask high school students to complete survey/response sheets assessing the value and success of the enterprise and commenting on things learned from the experience.
2. Monitor and record notes on the participation of individual high school students in the class discussions.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. How could this activity be modified for use with literature of other cultures?
2. How can skill building be incorporated into the project?

**Extension Activities:**

1. The teachers can videotape the viewing/celebratory session for later discussion with each of the classes.
2. Guest speakers, including family members or friends of the students, or members of the community, can be invited to talk about their previous homes in this or other countries.

**Resource:**

Fry, Rosalie K. (1995). *The Secret of Roan Inish*. New York: Hyperion.

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**Focus**

Cross-grade collaboration provides authentic audiences for communications at both levels.

For primary-grade students, oral reading allows access to texts too difficult for their independent reading and provides models of good literary language.

**Identifies teaching and learning strategies and results**

**Provides suggestions for extending the instruction and learning targeted in the vignette**

## Writing a Research Paper Secondary

|  |                                 |                        |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Language Arts Literacy Indicators:</b>  | <b>3.1 [12, 17]</b>             | <b>3.2 [9, 11]</b>     | <b>3.3 [7-8, 10-12, 17, 19]</b> |
|  | <b>3.4 [12, 16, 18, 20, 25]</b> | <b>3.5 [14, 16-17]</b> |                                 |
| <b>Cross-Content Workplace Indicators:</b> | <b>1 [1]</b>                    | <b>2 [2-3, 5-9]</b>    | <b>3 [1-5, 8-15]</b>            |
|  | <b>4 [1-3, 5, 9-10]</b>         |                        |                                 |

Mr. Hernandez, an English teacher, and Ms. Jordan, a social studies teacher, decided to coordinate their students' research activities. Each student would write a common paper for both classes. They would cite significant data from both fields in their papers. The teachers' plan called for students to create an imaginary couple whose biography could serve as a vehicle for making personal connections with history. The students would learn that historical knowledge underlies both fictional and factual accounts. This plan could be implemented as a long-range quarterly assignment or as a short-term project.

At the end of the first quarter, Mr. Hernandez asked his classes to create an imaginary couple. "He" was born in 1900 and died in 1986; "she" was born in 1907 and lived until 1989. Each class named the couple and were told that they would be researching the kinds of things that happened over the course of the couple's life. They were then assigned to groups and drew straws to see which group would study each decade (1900–1909, 1910–1919, and so on) of the fictional couple's life.

The groups were then asked to study their decades in terms of five topics: Political-Economic Situation—World; Political-Economic Situation—United States; Arts and Entertainment; Social Climate (Population, Immigration Patterns, Fashion, Slang, Family Life, etc.); Science and Inventions. Following a mini-lesson on developing research questions, each group member took one aspect to begin investigating and developed a question to use as a starting point.

During one period, the class brainstormed various avenues of research. These included interviews, books, magazines, electronic services, film, television, and record (or CD) covers. Mr. Hernandez found this was a good time to review any bibliographic formats necessary, especially the one for electronic services. Later, Ms. Jordan discussed primary and secondary historical resources with the students.

Soon after, Mr. Hernandez taught a mini-lesson on note taking: summary vs. paraphrase vs. direct quotation. Students practiced these techniques for note taking using available material, such as a text or magazine. Mr. Hernandez also reviewed correct interviewing techniques because many of his students had family members eager to participate in this project.

### Focus

Creating fictional characters allows students to personalize history. Note that these "characters" appear twice: once before the research and again before writing the research report. In each case, the characters function as a unique previewing and prewriting device.

Multidimensional study of a decade helps to develop an appreciation for the complexity of social issues/problems.

Developing research questions focuses the researcher's inquiry.

Use of multiple sources to study single topics helps students recognize both the breadth and depth of knowledge and promotes their development as resourceful researchers.

A mini-lesson provides instruction in skills when they are needed and relevant. Students are more likely to attend to instruction when they perceive the need for it.

Mr. Hernandez planned a work session with the library media specialist, Mr. Mulrone. As the two began working with students, Mr. Hernandez found himself reviewing points he had made in the mini-lessons on formats for note taking, while Mr. Mulrone assisted as students began to identify and locate primary and secondary historical resources.

In his classroom Mr. Hernandez put up a bulletin board display with the message, *Every note needs a source and a page number!* and placed examples of good notes around it. He also scheduled enough time during other lessons so that he could check on students' progress with their note taking, guiding them when they hit problems, such as making choices about which events to cover and quoting primary vs. secondary sources. The groups also convened for five or ten minutes periodically to trade materials with other group members.

Both Mr. Hernandez and Ms. Jordan checked the notes for formatting and content, and Mr. Mulrone conferred with students both individually and in small groups about their research strategies. The colleagues shared insights on student progress.

To help students connect personally with the time period they had researched and to provide stimulus for creative thinking, Mr. Hernandez asked his students to recall the fictional couple they had created and to refer to their notebooks for details. Then, students wrote letters as if they were the "he" or "she" of the couple during the specific time period they had researched. Various possibilities for each decade were discussed, including a love letter that might have been written during the couple's courtship and a letter written by either person as a grandparent to a grandchild. Students were encouraged to use slang from the period or to draw or find pictures of these fictional people as they might have dressed or acted. This spurred the creation of a box in which students placed toys and other objects of the specified periods, student-written fictional diaries, and baby books.

In Ms. Jordan's class, students began writing a draft of their research paper. They took their initial research questions, revised them, and used them as the focus for freewriting. Ms. Jordan instructed students not to refer to their notes at all during this phase so that the language would be their own. This became the part of the process that, according to both teachers, gave students ownership.

Over several class periods, both teachers showed students how to use their notes to revise their writing, adding information to existing text and documenting each note immediately. Mr. Hernandez demonstrated this process of documentation on an overhead projector. Once he was convinced students had mastered this, Mr. Hernandez encouraged them to continue working on their papers at home and in school. A due date for the second draft was specified.

Library media specialists are valuable resource persons for all classes.

Models of good notes help students create their own. Individualized assistance ensures that all students can successfully complete the project.

Opportunities for collaboration among teachers builds mutual support and respect within the school.

Students learn that historical research provides a foundation for both fictional and factual writing.

By asking students to freewrite without using notes, the teacher allows them to develop their own voices rather than those of the texts they have read.

Guided instruction leads to independence and mastery.

On that date, the groups reconvened to revise one another's papers for form and content. Next, the groups edited one another's papers for mechanics, grammar, and usage. Finally, polished papers were submitted. As a concluding activity, the class discussed ways in which the imaginary couple facilitated writing the research paper.

#### Possible Assessments:

1. Use rubrics constructed by the teachers and librarian for scoring the papers. Distribute the rubrics to students before they begin their research.
2. Have students write a pre- and post-research statement explaining what they know about the process of writing a research paper. Students can compare the two letters to evaluate their own learning.
3. Evaluate students' fictional correspondence and diaries for historical accuracy.
4. Use a checklist to guide students in the research process.

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. How might this project be further extended to include other areas of the curriculum?
2. How might this project affect students' views of history?
3. How could an English teacher effectively accomplish this project without the assistance of a social studies teacher?
4. How else might the school library media specialist participate in this project?

#### Extension Activities:

1. Student groups might be reconvened and asked to cooperatively write an overall introduction describing the project and providing introductions to each decade. Then, all of the papers, along with the collaborative writing, might be bound to create a compendium of the 20th century.
2. Students could choose a time period important in their family history and select an aspect of that period to investigate.
3. Students could contact historical societies to obtain materials on specific time periods.
4. Students could view films on the time periods to compare the filmmakers' version of that time period to their own understanding of it.

Writers must address issues of content/organization and revision before concerning themselves with matters of editing and publishing.

When students reflect on their learning processes, they can consciously and independently apply them in new situations.





## Developing a Rubric to Analyze Infomercials Secondary

|  |                       |                    |                        |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Language Arts Literacy Indicators:</b>  | <b>3.1 [7, 15]</b>    | <b>3.2 [10-13]</b> | <b>3.3 [7, 13, 16]</b> |
|  | <b>3.5 [9-10, 15]</b> |                    |                        |
| <b>Cross-Content Workplace Indicators:</b> | <b>1 [1]</b>          | <b>2 [2]</b>       | <b>3 [1-3, 7-14]</b>   |
|  |                       |                    | <b>4 [2-4, 10]</b>     |

As part of a unit designed to teach persuasive techniques and to encourage critical listening and viewing, Mr. Risha’s English class had been studying various propaganda techniques (e.g., connotative and slanted language, half-truths, testimonial, repetition, transfer, and types of appeals). Students defined terms and discussed examples that they and Mr. Risha had collected from advertisements and articles in newspapers and magazines. Now, Mr. Risha’s class would learn how to critically view infomercials and would develop a rubric for analyzing them.

After the students demonstrated an ability to recognize and identify a number of propaganda techniques, they viewed an infomercial video. Mr. Risha planned to show it twice. The first time students watched and listened simply as an audience, without note taking or interruptions. A follow-up class discussion established what the infomercial was promoting, who the presenter was, what kinds of endorsements were offered, what beneficial claims were made, and what visuals were used.

At this point, Mr. Risha asked the class to think about how they could evaluate the infomercial and to make a list of categories that they could use for this purpose. The students broke into small groups to share their ideas and to create charts that included important categories for critical listening and viewing.

Circulating among the groups, Mr. Risha encouraged the students to include such categories as the credibility of the speaker; persuasive techniques; types of language used (e.g., slanted vocabulary, half-truths, qualifiers, and actual facts); and visual and sound effects. For each category on the chart, students provided space for notes and comments. When the groups finished, Mr. Risha told the groups to bring their charts to class the following day.



Focus

Class discussion can generate and enrich ideas and lead to more discriminating viewing.

Classification enables students to organize their ideas.

By circulating as small groups work, the teacher is able to guide students and keep them on a productive path.



The next morning, Mr. Risha invited the students to review their charts in order to create a rubric for evaluating infomercials. After comparing the groups' charts, the class created a single chart with such headings as "credibility," "authority of the speaker," and "types of language used." Next, they devised a rubric based on their class chart, and the students determined where on the rubric to place each element. While discussing their rubric, students periodically recalled other infomercials they had seen that had similar characteristics.

A few days later, the students viewed the infomercial for a second time. This time the students took notes and used their class-generated rubric to analyze the video. After the class viewed the video the second time, Mr. Risha urged them to use their notes and rubric in a discussion of the information. He directed students to be more critical and to offer specific examples in support of their conclusions. The lesson finished with the students writing journal entries reflecting on the effect of taking notes and using a rubric to analyze the infomercial.

Clearly identified and defined criteria are a necessary foundation for a valid rubric. When students create their own rubric, they become more conscious of the need for criteria and more proficient critical thinkers.

Journal writing gives students opportunity to synthesize and reflect on their new learning.

#### Possible Assessments:

1. Review group evaluation charts for completeness.
2. Monitor the abilities of small groups to work cooperatively with the other groups to achieve a class goal.
3. Evaluate students' use of the rubric to analyze another infomercial.

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. How can the teacher help students become more conscious of the audio message presented in a primarily visual presentation?
2. How would the outcome of this experience have been different if Mr. Risha had created the rubric himself?
3. How might students be encouraged to develop valid criteria for evaluating a speaker's qualifications?

#### Extensions Activities:

1. The class could work in small production teams to create their own infomercials on topics of their choice. The infomercials could be videotaped and then evaluated by classmates.
2. Students could compare and contrast infomercials designed to appeal to different audiences (e.g., children, career women, and sports enthusiasts). They could then write an infomercial for the same product but appeal to an audience other than the original one.
3. Students could research the similarities and differences between infomercials and other forms of advertising.

## The Hero's Quest and Global Literature

### Secondary

|  |                                       |                      |                      |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Language Arts Literacy Indicators:</b>  | <b>3.1 [7, 13, 15, 20]</b>            | <b>3.2 [11]</b>      | <b>3.3 [7-8]</b>     |
|  | <b>3.4 [18, 21, 23, 26-27, 31-32]</b> | <b>3.5 [8, 13]</b>   |                      |
| <b>Cross-Content Workplace Indicators:</b> | <b>1 [1]</b>                          | <b>3 [1-4, 7-14]</b> | <b>4 [1-3, 9-10]</b> |

Ms. Zimmerman, an English teacher, wanted her seniors to understand the concept of a hero, the concept of a hero's quest, and the fact that the hero's quest occurs in many cultures. She designed a thematic world literature unit based on the concept of "The Hero's Quest."

Ms. Zimmerman began by asking students to brainstorm the characteristics they believe a hero possesses. As students called out ideas, she listed their suggestions on the board. Next, she asked the students to think of characters in movies or books that exhibit these characteristics. During the class discussion, Ms. Zimmerman asked, "What keeps the movie or novel going? What provides the action?" Students realized that each movie or novel hero they had mentioned was on some kind of a journey; each was going after something that was important and that often had value to many people. They also noted that these heroes had many difficulties reaching their goals. "That's right," said Ms. Zimmerman. "Heroes typically go on a quest." She wrote the word *quest* on the board. Then she asked students to add to their list of heroic characteristics things that would describe the hero's quest.

Using the student-generated list of heroic characteristics, Ms. Zimmerman then asked the students to compare their list to the basic characteristics and experiences of a hero that literary scholars identify. She distributed a handout containing these commonly accepted characteristics and experiences: a person of high rank and/or mysterious origin who goes on a journey, searches for a goal, may find that the goal reached is not the one expected, encounters many obstacles along the way, often is accompanied by a companion part of the way, has a descent into darkness, may suffer a physical or spiritual wound, and displays vulnerability. After comparing the two lists, students were pleased to see the parallels between their list and that of the scholars.

In the past, Ms. Zimmerman had introduced her students to the concept of the quest through examples from British and Western Literature, such as *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, *Oedipus Rex*, or *Beowulf*. This year, she decided to supplement this traditional reading list with examples from global and modern literature. She developed a list of parallel texts from other cultures and times, including: *Gilgamesh*, *The Mahabharata* (excerpts), *The Ramayana*, *The Awakening*, *Siddhartha*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Focus

The teacher activates prior knowledge based on students' common literacy experiences to provide the foundation for learning a new concept.

By allowing students to see how much they know, the teacher builds their self-confidence as learners.

Cross-cultural reading on a common theme promotes deeper understanding of the universality of the human experience.

Because of time constraints, Ms. Zimmerman decided to have the whole class study two works together and then have students select a third work to read independently. The class read *Beowulf*, an English epic, and one more-modern quest story, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Students read *Beowulf* first, discussing the quest motif as it developed throughout the story and elements of the hero's quest in the epic. Although the focus of the unit was on the theme of "The Hero's Quest," Ms. Zimmerman also reviewed literary devices that the epic presented. The classical hero in *Beowulf* pursued an external quest. The second work provided a contrast. Through class discussions of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, students began to see that a quest can also be internal. As Janie, the main character, searches for the "right man," she learns that she must rely on herself. Thus, Janie makes an internal discovery about herself, making this a personal quest story.

After using these two works to model how to focus on the elements of a hero's quest, Ms. Zimmerman asked students to select a title from a prepared reading list or to suggest another title with the same theme. Students reading the same selection then formed groups and met periodically to discuss their texts. After several days of group discussion, each group made a presentation to the whole class in which they summarized the story they read and then identified elements of the hero's quest in their text. Some students integrated a visual component, such as a chart, picture, video, or hypertext.

By providing guided practice through the reading of whole texts, the teacher prepares students for subsequent independent reading and discussion of the same genre.

Careful selection of text broadens students' understanding of theme.



**Possible Assessments:**

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1. Assess understanding by asking students to create and present a visual presentation of the hero's quest in either *Beowulf* or *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.
2. Assess understanding by asking students to apply the elements of a hero's quest to the experience of a contemporary (real or fictional) character.
3. Monitor contributions of group members to small-group discussions for quality and quantity.

**Questions for Reflection:**

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1. What are some other ways high school teachers can help students understand commonalities among works of literature from diverse cultures and times?
2. How can nontraditional or alternative methods of assessment be used in conjunction with oral and written presentations to assess the students' understanding of literary elements?
3. How would learning outcomes change if the teacher handed out the scholar's list at the onset of the unit?
4. In what ways might the teacher ascertain whether students can independently apply what they have learned?

**Extension Activities:**

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1. Small groups of students could prepare an annotated bibliography of literary works that contain a hero's quest.
2. Students could research the historical era in which one of the three heroes' quests is set.
3. In small groups, students could script and perform scenes from one of the three heroes' quests.

**Resources:**

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Campbell, Joseph. (1988). *The power of myth*. New York: Doubleday.

Stillman, Peter R. (1985). *Introduction to myth*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

## Writing and the Internet Secondary

|  |                     |                   |                              |
|--|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Language Arts Literacy Indicators:</b>  | <b>3.1 [7]</b>      | <b>3.2 [6-7]</b>  | <b>3.3 [6, 10-12, 18]</b>    |
|  | <b>3.4 [4, 8-9]</b> | <b>3.5 [17]</b>   |                              |
| <b>Cross-Content Workplace Indicators:</b> | <b>1 [1]</b>        | <b>2 [1-4, 6]</b> | <b>3 [2, 4-5, 10, 12-14]</b> |
|  |                     |                   | <b>4 [1-3, 10]</b>           |

When Ms. Wann's freshman English class was looking for pen pals in another part of the country, she decided to combine this writing-for-a-real-audience project with a lesson on using the Internet for locating information and using electronic mail (e-mail) for correspondence.

Working with the school's library media specialist, Ms. Wann arranged to take her ninth graders to the media center for two days. There the library media specialist, Mr. Kimble, and Ms. Wann demonstrated how to use a search engine (e.g., Yahoo or Alta Vista) to find information about high schools in other parts of the country. Ms. Wann showed students how to find information about a high school on the Internet by accessing the website of the students' own high school. She found the website under *New Jersey: Education: Secondary Schools*. Students in the class who had experience conducting Internet searches helped those who were inexperienced. Since Ms. Wann planned to model throughout this project, she selected a teacher as her Internet pen pal.

After reading their school's website and understanding what type of information was available, the students formed teams based on the area of the country they wanted to contact. Each team of students found a website for a school in another part of the country and then obtained the name of a contact person and an e-mail address for the school. Other students found pen pals by using *Classroom Connect* and listservs. Next, the students used e-mail to arrange contact with a class interested in communicating electronically with pen pals. The correspondence was then established with the approval of the teachers and parents.

Ms. Wann's students continued to communicate regularly with students across the country, and Ms. Wann continued her teacher-to-teacher e-mailing. At times, students corresponded on an agreed-upon topic, such as comparing their sports teams; other times, they discussed topics of their own choice. The teams assisted each other by making editing and content suggestions. With parental permission, some students exchanged photos. Periodically, students in Ms. Wann's class reviewed their saved e-mail file and selected pieces to share with each other.

Once students became proficient at working independently, Ms. Wann encouraged them to continue writing their pen pals even when the class's formal instruction on the Internet was completed. Mr. Kimble agreed to arrange computer time in the media center for those who were interested in doing this but did not have access to the Internet at home.

Focus

When classroom teachers and library media specialists work collaboratively on projects, they model cooperative behaviors that are necessary in the workplace.

Authentic writing experiences give students genuine reasons for learning.

Grouping based on shared interest in a topic ensures that students will move flexibly from one group to another as the topic changes.

The act of talking about writing enhances its development as an object of conscious thought.

**Possible Assessments:**

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1. Have students periodically review their electronic correspondence and use the file as the basis for a reflective essay concerning what they have learned about their correspondents who live in another part of the country.
2. Have students reflect on the differences between corresponding by computers and corresponding in traditional ways. Monitor the discussion for indication of students' ease and facility with both mediums.
3. Use a pre- and post-assessment survey to compare students' ability to search the World Wide Web and to use e-mail.

**Questions for Reflection:**

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1. How could teachers more fully integrate this writing activity with other parts of the curriculum?
2. What impact might corresponding by e-mail have on the writing development of students with different learning styles?
3. How could this project be expanded to increase students' knowledge of other technologies, e.g., video conferencing, sending attachments, and creating listservs?

**Extension Activities:**

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1. This activity could also apply to international pen pals and could be done in foreign languages as well as English.
2. Students could also investigate how businesses use cyberspace in their communications.
3. This activity might also motivate students to revise their school's website on the Internet or to create one if their school does not have one.
4. Students could produce a newsletter with stories, interviews, and anecdotes based on what they discovered through their e-mail correspondence.

**Teacher to Teacher: Introduction of Literary Perspectives  
Secondary**

|  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <b>Language Arts Literacy Indicators:</b>  | <b>3.4 [20-21, 29, 31-32]</b> |
| <b>Cross-Content Workplace Indicators:</b> | <b>3 [1-3, 7-14] 4 [10]</b>   |

Teachers at a New Jersey high school were discussing the new language arts literacy content standards, especially 3.4.29. Ms. Smith-Markham and Mr. Caruso, freshman English teachers, were particularly interested in how to introduce different literary perspectives to their students. They identified six critical viewpoints they felt freshmen should begin to work with: formalist, biographical, historical, sociological, gender, and reader response. They felt an informal introduction to these viewpoints would be most appropriate for ninth graders.

“Perhaps we are already doing this,” remarked Ms. Smith-Markham. “Think about when we teach *Great Expectations* or *A Raisin in the Sun*. The students investigate authors’ lives as well as the times in which they wrote. They also explore the time period in which the stories are set and the social structure of these times. When you think about it, we are introducing the novel or play through a biographical, historical, and sociological perspective.”

“That’s right,” said Mr. Caruso. “When I introduce *Great Expectations*, we spend time learning about the conditions and social classes of Victorian England. When we read *A Raisin in the Sun*, students study the movement of African Americans to northern cities and suburbs.”

“Yes,” agreed Ms. Smith-Markham. “Students often note the portrayal of women in these texts, which is looking at literature from the viewpoint of gender criticism. In fact, this is a perspective that generates the most lively class discussion and extended writing, particularly after students have done some research. Also after we have read and experienced the story, we sometimes do a close reading of the text, using a formalist approach to consider style, character, plot, imagery, and motif.”

Mr. Caruso added, “I think what we need to do now is to be more explicit with our students about the different ways in which they ‘read’ text. We can use the labels or terms for the different forms of literary criticism, but we probably shouldn’t put undue emphasis on them. I am going to have my students keep a section of their response journal where they record and label student responses from different perspectives. Later, they can use their response and perspective notes for writing about the text... and even guiding their reading of another text.”

“This discussion has given me another idea,” said Ms. Smith-Markham. “Let’s talk more about this later.”

Focus

Collaboration gives teachers opportunities to reflect on their own teaching.

Students should first experience the text for enjoyment of it before beginning any formal analysis of it.

Sharing ideas generates new ideas for more effective teaching.



**Possible Assessments:**

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1. Review response journals and notes for evidence of student understanding of multiple perspectives.
2. Review students' written analysis for evidence of a particular perspective.
3. Monitor students' increasing use and understanding of multiple perspectives when reading other texts.

**Questions for Reflection:**

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1. What literary experiences in the elementary and middle grades might prepare students for the study of multiple perspectives described here?
2. Why did these teachers decide on an indirect approach for introducing literary criticism with their students?
3. How can secondary English teachers at all grade levels work together to develop student understanding of literary criticism?

**Extension Activities:**

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1. Teachers could present their ideas for discussion and extension at a staff development workshop.
2. Teachers could videotape their classroom discussion of literature for later analysis of instructional scaffolding and student learning.
3. Administrators could provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate on other standards and indicators and the development of these throughout the secondary grades.

**Thematic Unit:** Analyzing Persuasive Speaking and Writing  
Secondary

|  |                                |                          |                                |                               |
|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Language Arts Literacy Indicators:</b>  | <b>3.1 [6-7, 9, 13-16, 18]</b> | <b>3.2 [9-13]</b>        | <b>3.3 [10-13, 15, 17, 19]</b> | <b>3.4 [21-22, 25, 30-31]</b> |
| <b>Cross-Content Workplace Indicators:</b> | <b>1 [1-2, 8]</b>              | <b>3 [1-3, 8, 10-14]</b> | <b>4 [1-3, 5, 7, 9-11]</b>     |                               |

Mrs. Ross' students came to her English class very excited about the candidates for junior class president who had just given their campaign speeches in the auditorium. Her students were critically examining the content of these speeches as well as the way in which they were presented. Mrs. Ross felt this would be a good time to begin a unit on persuasive speeches, one she hoped to coordinate with the social studies teachers.

Focus

She discussed the campaign speeches with the students and encouraged them to elaborate on their reactions to the speeches during journal writing. During the rest of the period, they shared these reactions and brainstormed how the candidates might have improved their speeches.

The next day, Mrs. Ross built upon the previous day's activities by having students begin to explore Patrick Henry's speech and Thomas Paine's political literature. Students were currently studying these two figures in their U.S. history class. Mrs. Ross and her social studies colleague, Mrs. Guerro, had agreed that Mrs. Ross would help students to analyze these speeches for rhetorical devices such as repetition, parallelism, restatement, and rhetorical questions. In social studies, the students would investigate the effects of Patrick Henry's speech on the public and, therefore, on the American Revolution.

The inclusion of primary historical sources in an English class extends students' understanding of the broad boundaries of literature.

Mrs. Ross' class began by reading Patrick Henry's *Speech in the Virginia Convention*. Most students were familiar with Henry's famous line "...give me liberty or give me death," but they had never read or heard the entire speech before.

After students had read the speech closely, Mrs. Ross helped them identify the rhetorical devices used for emphasis; and the class discussed how these devices made the speech effective. The students considered the audience to whom the speech was being delivered and Patrick Henry's reported manner of delivery. Then several students volunteered to role-play Patrick Henry delivering the speech. The class discussed these performances and then worked in small groups to define effective content and delivery of persuasive speeches. Next, the class then collaborated on a rubric they could use for critiquing their own persuasive speeches. Students began planning speeches that they would present to the class. After students identified an issue they felt strongly about, such as dumping waste off the New Jersey coastline or giving seniors extended privileges, Mrs. Ross encouraged them to incorporate into their own speeches some of the devices Patrick Henry used. She also allotted time for the students to

Careful guided instruction prepares students for independent application of new skills.

Student products are likely to be of higher quality when students have participated in making choices about them.

research their topics in the library media center.

While students planned and wrote their speeches, Mrs. Ross moved around the room to help individuals. When students were ready, they reviewed their writing with a partner before presenting their speeches to the class. During the oral presentations, students had a copy of the rubric, and they rated each other on the effectiveness of their speeches. This feedback was shared with each speaker.

Following the presentations, the class read excerpts from Thomas Paine's *The Crisis*. Again, Mrs. Guerro planned with Mrs. Ross so that the reading in the English class would parallel the social studies discussion of the effects of political literature on the American Revolution. Students compare persuasive devices used by Thomas Paine and Patrick Henry, particularly the uses of aphorism and metaphor in Paine's essay.

As an extension of this unit, students wrote persuasive essays using as many rhetorical devices as appropriate to sway their audience. Mrs. Ross explained at the beginning of the assignment how the final products would be assessed. Students then selected a topic, researched it in the library, identified the audience, prewrote, drafted, revised, and edited. During revising and editing, students met with peer editors for feedback. The final essay as well as the earlier drafts were submitted to the teacher. In addition, students attached a reflective piece that explained the kinds of changes that were made from first to final draft and how these changes improved the essay.

Both teacher assistance and peer feedback contribute to student achievement of learning goals.

The connections of speaking, listening, writing, reading, and viewing fuel growth in all areas of literacy.

The process of reflecting upon one's learning heightens metacognitive awareness and enhances critical thinking.

### **Possible Assessment:**

1. Use the class-constructed rubric for scoring students' other persuasive speeches.
2. Assess the students' persuasive essays using the Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric.
3. Review students' reflective pieces for evidence that students have become more conscious of their learning.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. What opportunities are available for connecting with colleagues in other disciplines to prepare parallel assignments?
2. What are the benefits of a teacher collaborating with students to construct a rubric?
3. What resources could help students construct scoring rubrics?

### **Extension Activities:**

1. Students could videotape a persuasive speech from CSPAN or another cable news source, analyze the tape, and select a five-minute segment of the taped speech to present to the class.
2. Students could identify and analyze the rhetorical features of a speech from a movie about politics, such as *The American President*, *All the King's Men*, or *The Manchurian Candidate*.
3. Teachers could arrange to have presentations videotaped so that students could self-assess their own work.

## Thematic Unit:

Study of Literature  
Secondary

|                                     |                                   |              |                     |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Language Arts Literacy Indicators:  | 3.1 [13, 15, 19-20]               | 3.2 [11, 13] | 3.3 [10-15, 17, 19] |
|                                     | 3.4 [18, 22-23, 25, 27-28, 31-32] | 3.5 [12-16]  |                     |
| Cross-Content Workplace Indicators: | 1 [1]                             | 2 [2]        | 3 [1-5, 8-15]       |
|                                     | 4 [1-3, 5-7, 9-10]                |              |                     |

As part of a grade eleven English unit on human conflicts, Mr. Johnston created thematic learning packets that students would use as tools for exploring war in literature. Students were to select a novel or topic for an in-depth analysis. The learning packets included the themes of the Vietnam War, Minorities at War, and the following war novels: Cormier's *The Chocolate War*, Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun*, Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. The learning packets contained a learning contract, forms, suggested methods of recording personal progress, and required tasks that were core to each learning packet.

Mr. Johnston provided an overview of the packets and told students they were to complete eight different tasks from a self-selected learning packet over a four-week period. Those tasks included: (1) a written synopsis of the novel or topic, (2) a critical review, (3) a journal, (4) an oral presentation on some aspect of human conflicts found in the literature they read, (5) a visual representation of some part of their reading, (6) an analytical essay, (7) a self-generated statement of a central theme important to the reader, and (8) an original cover design for a folder to hold these items.

Within a two-day period, students had selected their personal learning packets. Students who selected the same literature formed small groups and began to formulate plans of action and time schedules for specific content-focused activities. As a facilitator, Mr. Johnston interacted with students to review their plans, clarify requirements and criteria for performance, comment on written drafts, and offer suggestions that led to a variety of outcomes.

After reading *All Quiet on the Western Front*, three students shared comments and predictions from their journal entries. They then made arrangements to go to the media center to view a film version of the work for comparative analysis. Another trio of students compared their notes from the film version of *The Red Badge of Courage* with their journal responses to the novel before drafting their analytical essays. On another day, this same group got into a heated discussion with the *All Quiet on the Western Front* group about the purpose and value of war. Mr. Johnston suggested a debate, an idea that both groups accepted, and the students began planning for it.

## Focus

Themes provide coherence to the works studied that might otherwise be perceived as mere collections of episodes.

When students take responsibility for their learning, they move towards greater independence and maturity.

Student-developed action plans yield greater student commitment and provide cues for teacher feedback and guidance.

Journal writing encourages reading for different purposes.

Studying the same stories in different media provides insights into the strengths and weaknesses of each medium.

Debate fosters critical thinking and skills in constructing logical argument.

In another instance, a reader of the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* requested library time for additional research and a conference with the teacher to revise the learning packet tasks to conform more closely with his investigation of Malcolm's life. Two other students, having opted for literary works connected with the minorities-at-war theme, also met with Mr. Johnston to discuss ideas for their reading and analysis of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee*. The reader of *The Diary of Anne Frank* prepared and presented an original dramatic monologue by the young victim whose words provided a window to the human conflict of the Holocaust. That same student attempted to create a clay sculpture of Anne. This nonverbal response led the student and others into the art room where they worked with Mrs. Sullivan. Another student learned how to make papier mâché, which he used to replicate Kemmerich's boot from *All Quiet on the Western Front*, while someone else created a model of Archie's black marble box, a symbol of intimidation used in *The Chocolate War*.

Throughout the study, students fashioned objects and images, sketched characters and scenes, wrote, argued, and reflected about their personal journeys through a score of human conflicts often punctuated by the haunting question raised in *The Chocolate War* and debated within the classroom: "Do I dare disturb the universe?"

#### Possible Assessments:

1. Conduct ongoing observations of each student's engagement, motivation, and productivity.
2. Look for evidence of students' abilities to integrate research with their own ideas in their critical reviews and analytical essays.
3. Use a performance assessment rating form for oral presentations and non-verbal products.

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. How could the content and themes in this unit extend student learning in other content areas?
2. How do the learning packets enhance instruction?
3. What technology extensions might be incorporated?

#### Extension Activities:

1. Students' critical reviews, monologues, and analytical essays could be published as a class collection. This would require peer and teacher conferencing, revising, and peer editing.
2. The Anne Frank focus opens the door for expanded Holocaust studies and for studying genocide around the world.
3. In preparation for a discussion about the effects of education on human relations, students could use the Internet to research what international organizations are doing to reduce global illiteracy.

Research is a viable activity for expanding knowledge and objective analysis.

The fuller the experiences with literature and multiple opportunities to explore it, the more in-depth the appreciation of the work.

When students have opportunity for personal response to literature, they learn to value reading and become lifelong independent readers.

**Interviews  
Secondary**

|  |                               |                       |                            |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Language Arts Literacy Indicators:</b>  | <b>3.1 [14, 16-18, 21-22]</b> | <b>3.2 [9, 11-12]</b> | <b>3.3 [7]</b>             |
| <b>Cross-Content Workplace Indicators:</b> | <b>1 [1-3, 10-11]</b>         | <b>3 [1-8, 10-14]</b> | <b>4 [1-3, 5, 7, 9-11]</b> |

Students in a senior English class were preparing to apply to postsecondary schools or to seek employment. In both instances, seniors would find themselves in an interview situation. In order to help them prepare for this, Mrs. Ali decided to include an interview unit in her English IV course. In this unit, seniors would assess their personal strengths and practice communicating them to others in situations that modeled real life, such as college admissions or employment.

Mrs. Ali began the unit by asking students to describe the process for applying to a college or for a job and to decide whether any parts of the process made them anxious. Students identified the parts of the process as completing the application, taking tests, writing a personal essay for college application, and being interviewed. The tests and interviews were their greatest concerns.

Mrs. Ali responded to their concerns by remarking, “Well, you have had practice with taking tests since you first started school, and I know that some of you are studying books, taking practice tests at home, and even taking review courses for the SATs. But what about the interviews? What practice have you had with that?” A few students indicated they had been on job interviews; some had already had a college interview. These students elaborated on their experiences. Then Mrs. Ali asked, “Would it be helpful to you if we spent some time reviewing and practicing interviewing techniques and perhaps inviting in some guest speakers who are very knowledgeable about interviews?” The students appeared eager for these opportunities.

Mrs. Ali next asked students why they thought interviews were difficult. Typical comments were, “You have to talk about yourself.” Or, “They ask personal stuff, and it’s hard to think of a good answer on the spot.” To help them address these concerns, she had students free write in response to varied prompts: When I have free time, how do I choose to spend it? In which subject do I receive the best grades? In what subject in school did I have to work the hardest to learn? What are the two most important things that I have learned from a job?

From their written responses, students were to identify their strengths. Then in pairs, they shared the things they had identified. Students took turns listening to each other and giving feedback on how well their partners conveyed ideas and interests. When something was not clear, partners asked for elaboration and/or clarification. If a student included negative characteristics as well as strengths, this was noted. After partners both had a

Focus

Instruction is more meaningful and yields greater student participation when it is connected to the students’ background experience.

When students have opportunities to articulate problems, they are more apt to solve them.

Freewriting allows writers to write down all of their ideas on a topic without fear of judgment.

In a supportive environment, students use constructive feedback to rehearse and refine their ideas.



chance to share and respond, they took the feedback they received and began preparing for a school or job interview.

Mrs. Ali informed the class that they would be conducting mock interviews with their partners.

Mrs. Ali helped her seniors prepare for their mock interviews by inviting a speaker from the personnel division of a local company into the classroom to share ideas and strategies for successful interviewing. She then invited the Director of Guidance to share information on college application interviews.

After the class listened to both guest speakers and discussed common elements of successful interviews, students began preparing for their mock interviews. First, partners practiced serving as the interviewer and the applicant. Each student decided whether s/he would have a school admissions or job application interview. The information the guest speakers had shared with the class helped the students know what types of questions to expect during each type of interview so appropriate questions could be asked.

Pairs then interviewed each other in front of the class, and Mrs. Ali videotaped them so that students could self-assess their performances.

Following the class presentations, students viewed their performances, wrote a self-assessment, and conferenced with Mrs. Ali about their achievement during this unit.

Students benefit from critical listening for real-life purposes.

Switching roles enables students to understand the interviewer's perspective as well as the applicant's.

Self-assessment promotes engagement in the learning process.

Teacher conferences can confirm, modify, and extend self-assessments.

**Possible Assessments:**

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1. Have students use the accompanying rubric, "Interview Assessment Scale," as they observe application interviews.
2. Ask students to write a reflective piece based on the feedback they receive from their partners.
3. Evaluate each pair's questions for relevance, depth, and thoroughness.

**Questions for Reflection:**

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1. In what other ways could teachers use authentic needs to promote student learning?
2. What other resources might be included in a unit on interviewing?
3. Why is it important for students to speak and to listen in structured environments?
4. How might teachers adapt the rubric to identify appropriate interview behaviors and skills for specific circumstances?

**Extension Activities:**

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1. The practice interviews can be a mini-unit or part of a larger unit that includes writing résumés and letters of application.
2. Students could interview each other concerning their goals and interests and compile a class profile based on these interviews for a website on the Internet.
3. Students could brainstorm other reasons and contexts for interviews, create interview protocols, conduct the interviews, and discuss differences across the interview types.

| Interview Assessment Scale  |                                  |  |
|---|----------------------------------|--|
| Interviewer's name: _____ Applicant's name: _____   |                                  |  |
| <b>Clarity of Speech</b>  |                                  |  |
| spoke softly  | some words unclear               | spoke audibly                              |
| rapidly   | pace was uneven                  | well-paced                                 |
| <b>novice</b>   | <b>accomplished</b>              | <b>expert</b>                              |
| <b>Listening Skills</b>   |                                  |  |
| spoke before the interviewer was finished   | answered off the topic sometimes | waited and responded to each question      |
| <b>novice</b>   | <b>accomplished</b>              | <b>expert</b>                              |
| <b>Language Skills</b>  |                                  |  |
| incorrect grammar/usage   | minor grammar/usage errors       | correct grammar/usage                      |
| <b>novice</b>   | <b>accomplished</b>              | <b>expert</b>                              |
| <b>Impact</b>   |                                  |  |
| body language did not show interest   | body language showed interest    | body language showed enthusiasm & interest |
| maintained little eye contact   | maintained eye contact           | maintained eye contact                     |
| <b>novice</b>   | <b>accomplished</b>              | <b>expert</b>                              |
| Based on this feedback, please write a brief reflection that identifies your strengths and weaknesses and your plans for improving your interview skills. |                                  |  |

## Business Letters Secondary

|  |                         |                   |                            |                     |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Language Arts Literacy Indicators:</b>  | <b>3.1 [7]</b>          | <b>3.2 [7-8]</b>  | <b>3.3 [10-11, 15, 18]</b> | <b>3.4 [20, 25]</b> |
|  | <b>3.5 [17]</b>         |                   |                            |                     |
| <b>Cross-Content Workplace Indicators:</b> | <b>1 [1-4, 9]</b>       | <b>2 [5-6, 8]</b> | <b>3 [1-5, 8, 10-14]</b>   |                     |
|  | <b>4 [1-3, 5, 9-10]</b> |                   |                            |                     |

During a four-day introductory visit to the school's Career Center, Mrs. Chang's ninth-grade students learned to write a business letter. For some students in the class, it served as an introduction; for others, it was a review of the essential elements of the business letter form.

The class spent the first day working with Ms. Derco, the lead career counselor at the center. They began by completing an interest inventory that helped them assess their strengths. They used computer software programs to identify possible career choices and actual jobs that matched their strengths and interests. By the end of the lesson, each student had a printout that included the name and address of at least one professional organization related to one of their career choices.

On the second day, Ms. Derco explained that the students were going to write letters to obtain more information about the careers that interested them. Mrs. Chang asked the students to contribute all that they knew about the form and content of business letters. On the board, she made two columns for student responses, one headed *Form* and one headed *Content*. Students offered such suggestions as "date," "reasons for writing," "inside address," "sign your name," "give them an address," "dear so and so," and "thank you." Mrs. Chang then asked the students, "Is there anything we learned when we were studying persuasive speeches that might help us with these letters?"

"I think we need to make an argument about why they should send us information," offered Yusef.

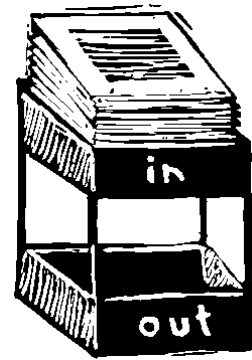
Amy suggested, "We could tell them we have done a career search and that their occupation was one that met our interests."

"Is there anything else we might indicate in this letter?" asked Mrs. Chang.

Miles said, "We should probably be pretty clear about what we want from them."

"That's a good idea," said Mrs. Chang. "I think we're now ready to write our letters. Decide to whom you want to write. Then refer to what we've written on the board to help you with your first draft."

Next, Mrs. Chang asked the students, "How would this letter be different from a letter you would write to a friend or to someone who knows you well?"



Focus

To increase the likelihood of their future success, students need to see a link between personal interests and abilities and career choices.

Inductive questioning enables students to recognize and apply what they know to real-life tasks.

Reference to previous language arts study reinforces understanding and makes explicit the connections between prior knowledge and new learning.

Jessica remarked, “Well, I can be pretty casual with my friends. I can use slang and make jokes. I don’t think I should do that in this letter.”

Tony added, “Yeah, and I have to use good English. I don’t have to do that with my friends.”

“Good point,” said Mrs. Chang. “Jessica and Tony talked about being casual and humorous with friends. Does anyone remember the literary term we used to describe these words?”

“Tone,” said Anna.

“Good,” said Mrs. Chang. “The tone in a business letter is more formal.”

Students then began to write their letters. One student chose to write to the American Association of Cosmetology Schools for information about training to become a makeup artist in the theater. Another wanted to write to the National Restaurant Association to find out about schools as well as on-the-job training to become a chef. A third student, one who loved airplanes, decided to contact the Aviation Safety Institute to ask about different career opportunities in the field of aviation.

After the students had selected an organization and decided what they would request, Ms. Derco gave each student a copy of a business letter template to use in setting up the letter correctly on the computer. She had created the form for the template using the students’ brainstorming from the previous day. The students filled in the information for the heading and inside address in the appropriate spaces. The body of the template provided three shaded areas suggesting three paragraphs. It also included the format for the closing.

After students completed and printed out drafts of their letters, they were paired to exchange and review each other’s writing. The students were told to read their partner’s letters as though they were the recipients and then to discuss the clarity and correctness of the writing. After these discussions, the letters were returned for revisions.

When the final drafts were ready, students showed them to Mrs. Chang or Ms. Derco for approval. If the work was judged “letter perfect,” the student was instructed to print out two copies and an envelope. One copy was mailed; the other was kept on file in the student’s portfolio.

Any students who did not complete the assignment by the end of the fourth class period were required to make an appointment with the career counselor to come back during a study period or after school hours to finish.

Students develop knowledge and appreciation of technology when it is used for real-life purposes.

Writing for real audiences helps students understand the importance of using the conventions of standard written English.

**Possible Assessments:**

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1. Have students discuss their experiences with identifying their interests, searching for a likely career, identifying a source of information about that career, and drafting a letter. Monitor student enthusiasm and learning revealed by student comments.
2. Assess students' reflective pieces that compare first drafts and final letters.
3. Evaluate students' essays in which they discuss the process used by the class for career exploration and other ways in which they might learn about career options.

**Questions for Reflection:**

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1. Why should ninth graders be concerned about a career search?
2. How can a teacher help a student whose career expectations are very low?
3. What should the teacher do if there is no response to the letter?

**Extension Activities:**

---

1. Students can report to the class on the responses received from the letters sent.
2. This lesson could be the beginning of a larger research project on a particular career choice, either the one for which they sent their letter or another choice identified during their career exploration.
3. Have students write letters requesting information about summer job opportunities.

**Peer Collaboration:**

**Group Projects  
Secondary**

|  |                               |                        |                           |
|--|-------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Language Arts Literacy Indicators:</b>  | <b>3.1 [7-8, 13, 15, 18]</b>  | <b>3.2 [9, 11, 13]</b> | <b>3.3 [7, 12]</b>        |
|  | <b>3.4 [18, 22-23, 31-32]</b> | <b>3.5 [12-14]</b>     |                           |
| <b>Cross-Content Workplace Indicators:</b> | <b>1 [1, 3]</b>               | <b>3 [1-4, 8-15]</b>   | <b>4 [1-3, 5-6, 9-10]</b> |

As the culmination of an eight-week unit on elements of the short story, Miss Coats created advertising/marketing teams in her ninth-grade English class to promote popular interest in short stories from the unit. They would develop thematically linked products for one of the following short stories: “The Most Dangerous Game,” “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,” “The Interlopers,” “The Gift of the Magi,” “A Mother in Mannville,” “The Heyday of the Blood,” “The Cask of Amontillado,” “The Scarlet Ibis,” and “The Lady or the Tiger.” Miss Coats explained that the project would take about a week of 40-minute class periods and would involve group and independent work.

She explained the procedure. Four-person teams would be responsible for creating individual artistic projects that share a common one-sentence theme, symbol or logo, and mood. Possible projects that members of the team would create might include a children’s book, a tee shirt and cap, trading cards with captions, a board game, a greeting card, a comic strip, a poem or song, a lunch box, or a coffee mug.

On the first day, Miss Coats reviewed the definitions of theme, symbol, and mood. The class discussed the relationship among the three in various stories they had read as well as in current cinema and commercial advertising. Students then filled out short-story survey forms on their favorite three stories in the unit. The survey form included questions exploring possible themes, reasons why the students liked the stories, and a space for freewriting on the moods of the stories.

On day two, Miss Coats organized the class into teams. Each team was assigned a short story based on their responses on the survey forms. First, team members shared their responses on the survey form, looking for similarities and differences in their views of the assigned story. Next, Miss Coats asked each team to discuss possible illustrations for symbol and mood and to state the theme in a sentence. Once the team decided on the common elements, the team captain helped organize the group to produce three or four different projects.

While one group discussed the importance of the color red for the mood and logo of their “Scarlet Ibis” products, another group wrestled with the difficulty of isolating a theme for “The Lady or the Tiger.” One member asked Miss Coats whether the theme could be expressed in the form of a question rather than a sentence. Miss Coats reconvened the whole class for a discussion of this possibility.

Focus

Discussion and identification of themes allow students to recognize common aspects of human existence.

Use of the survey allows students to reflect over their learning, think critically about their reading experience, and provide input for teacher planning.

Through the give-and-take of small-group discussions, students learn to recognize multiple perspectives and gain practice in supporting their own point of view with evidence.



By day three, students were actively working within their groups on individual projects. A student developing a board game on the “Scarlet Ibis” shared an idea with a student creating a children’s book based on the same story. In another group, a student producing trading cards on “The Cask of Amontillado” made sure that her cards depicted different scenes from those shown on her groupmate’s greeting cards.

By day four, groups were ready to assess and evaluate their progress and process. Within their groups, students discussed what they found most and least challenging about the activity. The team captain recorded their responses in two columns. In a whole-group discussion, the groups seemed to agree on some similar difficulties: The mood in both “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty” and “Scarlet Ibis” shifts back and forth. It is difficult to design a logo for a story with more than one symbol. One student asked, “If two readers identify different themes, which theme is correct?” Miss Coats reminded the class that if both readers can find evidence in the text to support their interpretations, then both are valid. She advised students to look for ways to link the different interpretations. Miss Coats recognized that the students needed more time to complete the task, so she extended the project for two more class days. Students used day five to resolve their differences and adjust their projects.

By day six, students had completed artistic projects and were ready to prepare a group presentation of their work. One group argued about the logical order of the product presentations. A member of the group suggested that the group solve the problem by presenting in age-appeal order since all their merchandise catered toward children (game, book, trading cards, lunch box). In this way, she suggested, their marketing strategy could be that the story and its products are “family friendly.”

On the final day, after students had presented their work, the class used a rubric to score the products and presentations and then gave reasons for their scores.

Group work enables students to learn from each other.

Formative assessment allows students and the teacher to clarify problems and adjust learning goals.

Encouraging students to solve their own presentation problems invites resourcefulness and builds self-esteem.

Peer feedback can elicit strong motivation for learning.

**Possible Assessments:**

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1. Observe peer interactions on a daily basis.
2. Assess the theme, logo, and mood of individual projects for depth of understanding.
3. Provide students with a self-assessment form focusing on the student's ability to work productively on group and individual goals.

**Questions for Reflection:**

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1. In what ways does the activity prepare students for problem solving and peer interactions in the workplace?
2. How does the activity make the information more accessible to visual or auditory learners?
3. Why is this an appropriate language arts literacy activity?

**Extension Activities:**

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1. This project could be extended across the curriculum by engaging the cooperation of the graphic arts and/or business departments.
2. Students could collect copies of current ad campaigns and identify the theme, logo, and mood.
3. Students could script, perform, and videotape versions of their short story for class presentation.

# Becoming American:

## Jasmine from India to Iowa Secondary

|                                     |                            |               |                                  |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|
| Language Arts Literacy Indicators:  | 3.1 [7, 15, 20]            | 3.2 [5-6, 11] | 3.3 [3-4, 7-8]                   |
|                                     | 3.4 [18, 23, 27-28, 31-32] | 3.5 [12-14]   |                                  |
| Cross-Content Workplace Indicators: | 1 [1]                      | 2 [2]         | 3 [1-4, 8-14] 4 [1-3, 5-7, 9-10] |

Because the heroine in *Jasmine* represents many of the universal struggles encountered by adolescents as they move into adulthood, Mr. Toussaint decided to use the 1989 novel by Indian American author, Bharati Mukherjee, as a key work in his World Literature course.

Before distributing copies of the book, Mr. Toussaint asked his students to respond to several questions in their journals: (1) What ethnic, national, or group affiliations would you use to help define yourself? Why/On what basis do you feel that you belong to these groups? (2) How did you come to live in America? Why did you or your family decide to come to this country? (3) If you could live anywhere on earth, where would that place be? Why would you choose that place? In small groups, students then shared what they wished from their journals.

After a silent reading of the brief first chapter of *Jasmine*, Mr. Toussaint asked his students to brainstorm their initial impressions of the book and its main character while a designated student recorded the group's ideas. A representative of each group outlined that group's "first take" on the board, and the impressions were then compared and contrasted in whole-class discussion.

Working together with his students and their academic calendar, Mr. Toussaint plotted a reading chart of the book's chapters and due dates for assignments and for group presentations based on the reading. He then asked students to use the first chapter and the dust jacket notes to identify aspects of the book they wished to explore. Questions raised included: "What does some immigrant girl have to do with me?" "Why does the writer tell her story this way, jumping back and forth in time?" "Why should someone believe what an old man tells her?"

The answers to these questions, Mr. Toussaint suggested, could be found as the students continued their reading. He reminded the students to write their questions in their journals so they could consider them while reading and discuss the questions upon completing the novel. He added, "As you are reading and ideas occur to you about these questions, jot your ideas down." He then asked students to recall novels they had previously read and discussed earlier in the year and to identify elements common to these novels. Together, they formulated a list of the elements, including story line, themes, characters, structures, style, and setting.

Focus

Journals help to establish a personal connection to works being read. If students are encouraged to maintain journals while reading a literary piece, they become more active readers.

Reading is a social as well as private experience.

Student involvement in unit planning helps to ensure ownership and motivation.

Looking for elements and themes in multiple texts increases knowledge of story structure.



Students were encouraged to keep reading logs on the various aspects of the novel, chapter by chapter. The class was divided into four groups, one considering the portion of the novel that took place in Jasmine's native India, one following her journey from India to Florida, one focusing on her New York experiences, and the fourth and final group, studying the Iowa segment of the book. Since the novel's structure included both straightforward narration and flashbacks, students found the geographic moorings to be very helpful in their comprehension of the novel.

Mr. Toussaint provided class time for the reading/preparation groups to meet twice a week until both the reading and the preparation were completed. Each of the four groups created topical outlines to accompany their presentations and supplemented their presentations with activities that involved peers. These activities included role-playing games, such as character and incident identification through charades.

In the discussion that flowed from the presentations and other activities, students focused on Jasmine's constant invention and reinvention of herself, using her four names, Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase, and Jane, as context clues. One student enlarged the scope of the discussion by recalling Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby, another character who reinvented himself. A film buff in the class remembered reading that in old-time Hollywood, studios chose new names for performers as they started their screen careers and gave as an example John Wayne, who had been Marion Morrison.

Discussion of the violent scenes depicted in the novel, including Jasmine's rape and the death of her Hindu husband in a Sikh-engineered explosion, reinforced the global relevance of the book's elements. The question of violence as a means to a political end was introduced by the team discussing Jyoti's Indian experiences. Other seemingly intractable conflicts, such as those between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the Muslims, Serbs and Croats, the Protestant and Catholic Northern Irish, and the Hutus and Tutsis of Rwanda and Burundi, were brought up by various students and linked to the Hindu-Sikh animosity in *Jasmine*.

Certain thematic aspects of the book particularly interested the students: the feminist challenge to the patriarchal order which the title character embodies; the inherent difficulties of learning a new language and new customs; and the struggle to become an American while debating whether to remain true to one's roots. Both the team dealing with Jasmine's New York experience and the team dealing with Iowa posed essentially the same questions: "What did she learn from the men around her?" "What did she come to realize about herself?" "How did she defy the men in her life and become her own person?"

To supplement the novel's portrait of life in rural India, Mr. Toussaint showed his students Satyajit Ray's 1973 film, *A Distant Thunder*, which, while set in Bengal in the World War II-created famine, made students aware of the poverty and caste system that were so much a part of Jasmine's background. Upon completion

By using small groups and providing a range of activities, the teacher promotes maximum student participation.

Students often have a wealth of information that can enrich class discussion.

Quality texts lend themselves to broad discussion.

Involving students' diverse interests in discussion enlarges the spectrum of themes to be found in a literary work.

Students need opportunity to reflect on changes in their thinking as a result of new literary experiences.

of the novel and the film, the students returned to their initial questions about the book and the ideas they had jotted down. They used these notes to reflect on the novel and on changes to their questions as a result of having experienced the text.

#### Possible Assessments:

1. Monitor student discussions of their initial and final questions about the novel for changes in understanding.
2. Evaluate student group presentations for clarity of communication.
3. Assess students' understanding of the elements of the novel as reflected in their discussion of Jasmine.

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. In what other ways could the teacher release responsibility for learning to the students?
2. What value is there for a teacher to extend discussion of a literary theme to world events?
3. How can a teacher tell from a student's response whether the student has made connections between the novel and the film?

#### Extension Activities:

1. Students could see a film based on the immigrant experience, such as *America, America*; *Coming to America*; *El Norte*; *Mississippi Masala*; and *Hester Street*. They could then write an essay comparing Jasmine's experiences to those of the main character(s) in the film of choice.
2. Students could generate both visual and print text plotting all of the various points in Jasmine's journey from India to Iowa and the effect that those various places had on the formation of her character.
3. A class debate on the topic, "To assimilate or not to assimilate (to preserve differences) and at what cost?" might be structured. The class could be divided into three groups: the framers/presenters, the pro-assimilationists, and the anti-assimilationists, with the framers deciding which arguments were the more persuasive to them.
4. Students could survey the reviews of *Jasmine* by professional critics and write an original review as well, or research the critical response to Mukherjee, both as an Indian writer and as an American writer, using *Bharati Mukherjee—Critical Perspectives*, edited by Emmanuel S. Nelson (1993), as a point of departure.
5. Relatives and/or friends of the students or members of the community at large could be invited to appear as guest speakers, discussing their own experience as immigrants, thus cross-referencing those of Jasmine.

## Introducing the Harlem Renaissance: Setting Literature in a Historical Perspective Secondary

|  |  |                                  |                            |
|--|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Language Arts Literacy Indicators:</b>  | <b>3.1 [1, 7]</b>                              | <b>3.2 [1, 3-4, 6-7, 11, 13]</b> | <b>3.3 [1, 3-4, 7, 10]</b> |
|  | <b>3.4 [1-2, 5, 8-9, 18, 24-25, 27, 31-32]</b> |                                  |                            |
|  | <b>3.5 [1-2, 11-12, 16]</b>                    |                                  |                            |
| <b>Cross-Content Workplace Indicators:</b> | <b>3 [1-3, 10, 14]</b>                         | <b>4 [1-3]</b>                   |                            |

Students entered Ms. Ryan's junior class to the strains of jazz playing softly in the background. As the music continued, the lights dimmed and a slide show began. Works of art and photographs were projected onto a screen at the front of the room. After ten minutes, the slides froze on an image of a river, the music grew softer, and the students began to hear the words of Langston Hughes's poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." When the poem ended, the slide projector was turned off; and the lights were turned on. Ms. Ryan asked the class to discuss their reactions to this experience and to comment on the relationships between what they had seen and heard. Ms. Ryan told the class, "You have just experienced some of the greatest products of the Harlem Renaissance."

Next, Ms. Ryan asked the class to take out their journals and write their definition of the Harlem Renaissance based on their prior knowledge and on what they had just discussed and experienced. She then asked students to share with a partner what they had written and to make any revisions they wanted in their definitions. After the pairs read their definitions to the class, the students discussed common elements of the definitions and particularly interesting observations. Ms. Ryan told the class that they would be studying major works of the Harlem Renaissance, especially works of literature. She noted that during their study they would revisit their definitions to revise and extend them as students became more familiar with that period.

For homework, Ms. Ryan asked the students to read the background information on the Harlem Renaissance in their literature books and to look up the word *renaissance* in the dictionary. After reading the materials, students were to write down three questions they had about the Harlem Renaissance and to bring these questions to class the next day. Ms. Ryan told students that she planned to use these questions as she prepared future lessons on this period in American Studies.



Augusta Savage

The drama of the multimedia presentation raises interest, stirs curiosity, and motivates learners to want to know more.

Journal writing provides students with the opportunity to synthesize experience with new information.

Focus

The changes in the definition will give students a tangible record of their own learning.

When students create questions based on text, they have an opportunity to reflect on the significance of what they have read.

**Possible Assessments:**

1. Monitor student contributions to the discussion of the media presentation for evidence of inferential and evaluative thinking.
2. Assess students' ability to extrapolate from the media presentation and the class discussion in order to write an initial definition of the Harlem Renaissance.
3. Use students' three questions as a source of information about what students know and want to know about the period.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. What advantages were there to using a multimedia presentation to introduce the topic?
2. What else might have been included in this introductory presentation?
3. Why is the Harlem Renaissance an important period of American Literature?

**Extension Activities:**

1. Students could conduct independent studies of a novelist or poet who was part of or influenced by the Harlem Renaissance.
2. Students, working in small groups, could research one art form of the Harlem Renaissance (e.g., art, architecture, music, poetry, or theater) and report their findings.
3. The English and social studies teachers could coordinate activities illuminating how particular events or people contributed to the developments of the Harlem Renaissance.

**Resources:**

Campbell, Mary. (1987). *Harlem renaissance: Art of Black americans*. New York: Abrams Publishing.

Floyd, Samuel. (1990). *Black music in the Harlem Renaissance: A collection of essays*. New York: Greenwood Publishing.

William, Michael. (1993). *The African-American encyclopedia*. New York: Marshall Cavendish.





## Conferencing with Student Writing Portfolios Secondary

**Language Arts Literacy Indicators:** 3.1 [7, 12] 3.2 [3, 8, 12] 3.3 [1-5, 7-10, 12-13]  
3.4 [23, 32]

**Cross-Content Workplace Indicators:** 1 [1] 3 [1-3, 8, 10] 4 [1, 3, 10]

Every year, students in grades 3–12 complete a “Best Works Writing Portfolio.” This portfolio includes two pieces of writing from each of the grade levels and a year-end reflection. During the year, students keep working writing folders of all their assignments. At the end of each year, they pull pieces from these folders to put into their “Best Works” portfolios. Key to portfolio completion are three steps: collection, selection, and reflection.

Mr. Daniels, an eleventh-grade English teacher, holds individual conferences for selection and reflection near the end of each marking period. He believes that this makes the final selection and reflection in June easier for the students. In addition, he feels that periodic selection of and reflection on portfolio items helps both the teacher and the student see where growth has occurred and where further instruction and practice is needed. An important part of the process each period is the teacher’s conferencing with each student as s/he makes the selection and prepares to write a reflection. Students bring their writing folders to the conference with Mr. Daniels. In the scenario that follows, Mr. Daniels is conferencing with a junior named Niki. Niki has had some difficulty writing, but she wants to improve. This conference occurred in January at the end of the second marking period.

“Well, Niki, I see you have completed several pieces of writing this quarter. Do you have any favorite ones?” asked Mr. Daniels.

“Well, there’s really only one that I like a lot,” replied Niki.

“Let’s take a look at that one. Why don’t you get it out and start by telling me what you like about it.”

“I feel good about the piece I wrote after we read *The Red Badge of Courage*. I like this essay because I think it was the first time I was able to write about literature, you know, like you asked us to, as literary analysis. Last year, I liked to write about stuff I know about, but I couldn’t really write about literature.”

“Well, let’s have a look at that essay again.”

After taking out the essay she selected, Niki read it aloud for Mr. Daniels. He then responded, “I can see why you might want to include this essay in your portfolio. It does show your understanding of the character, and it is more focused than some of your earlier essays. Can you tell me why you think you improved? What helped?”

Focus

Through conferencing, the teacher can guide students to identify the features of proficient writing and to develop awareness of their writing strategies.

Regularly scheduled conferences within the Writing Workshop take place while other students engage in drafting, peer conferencing, and other writing-related tasks.

The teacher invites the student to set the agenda for the conference so the student can engage in self-diagnosis.

Effective teacher questions promote student reflection.

“Our having a chance to talk about the story a lot before we wrote about it made writing easier. Also, I got a lot of feedback from my peer editor as I was revising the essay. I never rewrote an essay three times before.”

“You must have liked your ideas to stick with them for three revisions. Do you think that these revisions indicate you have gained confidence in your ability to make effective changes to improve your writing?”

“Sure. Look at these earlier drafts. I made changes all over them. In fact, I thought I might write about them in my reflective piece.”

“Good. You might want to explain in your reflection why you made certain changes and what you learned by doing this. You don’t have to comment on every change you made. Pick out two or three changes that you feel made the paper better. Can you show me one now?”

“I guess changing my introduction from being real general to being specific like you taught us helped me focus the whole paper.”

“That’s a good example. Your paper certainly is more focused. I am happy to see this improvement. You did a good job. In your reflection you might want to refer to specific details as you explain how you actually changed it. Before we end our conference, I have one more question: What do you feel you still need help with? What do you need to improve next in your writing?”

“I guess that would be editing more carefully. Now that I sort of understand the structure of the literary essay, I need to check my writing more carefully before doing my final copy, but I don’t always catch those errors.”

“This is a common concern of many students in this class. I plan to do some mini-lessons on editing that I think will help everyone. Let me know if you find those lessons useful, okay?”

“Okay. I’m ready to start writing my reflective piece now.”

“Keep all your papers. Remember, in June we will go back over all your selections and choose two for the Best Works portfolio that moves on with you next year.”

Sometimes students can be helped to recognize personal growth when it is articulated by the teacher.

Timely suggestions can help students move from global awareness of a topic to a specific purpose for writing.

Conferences can help students set new writing goals.

Through conferencing, teachers can assess student needs and plan future instruction.

**Possible Assessments:**

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1. Compare a first and final draft of a piece of writing for improvement in organization, sentence structure, usage, and mechanics.
2. Use a rubric to evaluate students' self-assessment as revealed by evidence of growth in their reflective pieces.
3. Observe student behaviors during the conference, taking notes on signs of increasing sophistication concerning their writing abilities.

**Questions for Reflection:**

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1. What are some other questions students and teachers can focus on during a portfolio conference?
2. How can portfolios be developed for use in other areas of the curriculum?
3. What other types of artifacts might students include in their portfolios for the English/language arts classroom?

**Extension Activities:**

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1. Students review portfolio contents from two or three years ago and write a reflective paper concerning their growth as writers since then.
2. The teacher videotapes student conferences and has students analyze and critique the teacher's strategies.
3. Have students research what other writers have said about their writing processes.

# Short Story and Film:

## Cross-Grade Collaborations Elementary/Secondary

|                                     |                     |                     |                  |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Language Arts Literacy Indicators:  | 3.1 [1, 7-8, 10]    | 3.2 [1, 8]          | 3.3 [1, 7-8, 18] |
|                                     | 3.4 [1, 23, 26, 32] | 3.5 [1, 12, 14, 16] |                  |
| Cross-Content Workplace Indicators: | 1 [1]               | 2 [2]               | 3 [1-3, 8-13]    |
|                                     |                     |                     | 4 [1-3, 6, 9-10] |

Ms. Mellody, first-grade teacher, and Mr. Devereaux, eleventh- and twelfth-grade World Literature teacher, decided to have their students work concurrently on multifaceted projects concerning *The Secret of Roan Inish*, the Celtic-based short story and the film that writer/director John Sayles adapted from it. These projects would culminate in a sharing of the projects at the high school.

Mr. Devereaux visited the elementary classroom to introduce *The Secret of Roan Inish* and begin the oral reading of the story. Before beginning to read, he asked the students to think about favorite relatives they liked to see. At the end of the introductory reading, the children responded in a chain of associations—some more appropriate than others—linking the story to their own experiences:

“I visit my grandmother in Florida, and we go to the beach together.”

“My family goes to the shore in the summer.”

“My brother lives with my father. I miss him.”

Since the children would be asked to keep reading logs throughout their school careers, Ms. Mellody and Mr. Devereaux gave the first graders the opportunity to make picture and/or word records as part of their reactions to what they had heard during the reading. These pictures/word records would become the basis for the children’s end-of-project chap books and a class banner.

Both the elementary and secondary students shared the same set of texts, the high schoolers reading the text aloud on their own, the elementary students having the text read aloud to them by their teacher and also taking the text home for parental reading and reinforcement. In both cases, the teachers wanted to approximate the tradition of oral storytelling for the students by having them hear the story as it was read aloud.

The World Literature students discussed the universal thematic components of the story: the search for a lost home and family and the interaction of the human and natural worlds. Having already met the high-level challenges of *King Lear* and *Ran*, the Japanese film adaptation of the Shakespearean play, the World Literature students recognized the archetypal components of *The Secret of Roan Inish*.

“Reunion with a separated family member—that’s one thing they both have in common,” offered one student.

### Focus

Cross-age collaboration provides authentic audiences for communications at both levels.

For primary-grade students, oral reading allows access to texts too difficult for their independent reading and provides models of good literary language.

For secondary students, the opportunity to read aloud on their own connects them to the oral language tradition.

“If you subtract the passage of time and the advance of technology, you can see that all these stories are myths,” commented another.

“Shakespeare lived only a few hundred miles away from the islands in the story,” remarked one particularly geographically astute student.

“Yeah, and if you believe James Tyrone, Sr., Shakespeare was an Irish Catholic anyway,” countered the resident class wit/wise guy.

The first-grade children worked on their reading logs both in the classroom and at home since parents and other family members shared the reading responsibilities with the classroom teacher. Each child then created his or her own brochure or chap book based on his or her reading log responses to the story, allowing for individual expression and interpretation. The students also created a group banner illustrating the characters and events in the story, working together with Ms. Mellody and with their art teacher.

The elementary school children were the guests of the high school students at a communal celebration, featuring the first graders’ banner and chap books, a viewing of the film, and a buffet of ethnic and American food, prepared by Mr. Devereaux and his students. Invitations to individual first graders were answered with thank-you notes drawn or written by the first graders. Then, during the celebration, the high schoolers read the first graders’ chap books and wrote back to them on a sheet of paper attached for these messages.

Parental involvement reinforces the home-school connection and should be promoted at every opportunity.

**Possible Assessments:**

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1. Ask high school students to complete survey/response sheets assessing the value and success of the enterprise and commenting on things learned from the experience.
2. Monitor and record notes on the participation of individual high school students in the class discussions.
3. Ask students at both levels to discuss how the film changed or confirmed the mental pictures they got from the story. Assess their responses.

**Questions for Reflection:**

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1. How could this activity be modified for use with literature of other cultures?
2. How can skill building be incorporated into the project?
3. What other kinds of activities lend themselves to cross-grade collaboration?

**Extension Activities:**

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1. The teachers can videotape the viewing/celebratory session for later discussion with each of the classes.
2. Guest speakers, including family members or friends of the students, or members of the community, can be invited to talk about their previous homes in this or other countries.
3. Librarians and other media specialists can be invited to offer their input as to possible choices of material from other cultures and to serve as resource persons for student research in children's ethnic literature, film, and music.
4. Students can write their own myths and share them with another age group, using storytelling techniques.

**Resource:**

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Fry, Rosalie K. (1995). *The Secret of Roan Inish*. New York: Hyperion.